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Contact: Laura Kendellen
(O) 414.727.6364 x10

Thousands Rally at State Capitol to Protect Workers *Senate Vote Postponed*

Madison –Yesterday, Senate Democrats and two Republicans left the state in order to postpone the vote on Gov. Walker’s Budget Repair Bill which will strip over 200,000 public employees of their workplace rights including the right to bargain collectively.

“Gov. Walker is avoiding a true democracy by not allowing time and space for the public to respond to the bill,” said SEIU Wisconsin State Council President Mike Thomas. “The senators who left the state are courageously standing up for the working families of Wisconsin and want to make sure their voices are heard.”

Late Wednesday night, the bill was passed by the Joint Finance Committee. The public hearing lasted nearly 20 hours on Tuesday and Wednesday as hundreds of Wisconsinites voiced their opposition of the bill.

An outraged public has been jamming legislators’ phone lines, sleeping over in the Capitol building, and holding protests all over the state. 2,000 rallied at the Capitol on Monday; 15,000 rallied at the Capitol on Tuesday; 30,000 rallied at the Capitol on Wednesday; and 40,000 rallied at the Capitol on Thursday. Thousands across the state continue to protest the bill today and over the weekend.

“Public and private workers alike have the basic human right to have a voice at work,” said Thomas. “The budget shortfall was not caused by public employees, but they are being demonized by Gov. Walker and the Republican majority in the State Legislature. Public employees are dedicated to providing quality public services to Wisconsin’s families and deserve to be treated and compensated fairly for their hard work. All Wisconsinites will suffer from the loss of those services. Gov. Walker refuses to even sit down and negotiate with workers. It’s shameful.”

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau, a non-partisan investigative agency, has reported that Gov. Walker’s “budget crisis” with a \$3.6 billion deficit is based on agency requests for \$3.9 billion in new spending which have yet to be approved by the legislature and they aren’t likely to approve that much spending as it is.

Furthermore, the budget forecast for the next biennium projects \$1.5 billion in additional revenue, but no thanks to Gov. Walker's special session bills. According to the Fiscal Bureau's report, three of Gov. Walker's bills have caused more than half of the new budget shortfall. Those three bills are the health savings accounts bill, the business tax breaks bill, and the \$25 million increase for economic development bill, a fund which has over \$70 million currently.

In addition to stripping away collective bargaining rights, the Budget Repair Bill also removes union dues requirements for employers, freezes wages and raises, increases employees' pension contribution to 5.8%, negatively affects workplace rules including safety regulations, and while decreasing health care benefits it increases health care costs to at least 12.6%. The bill will also downsize crucial Medicaid programs like BadgerCare Plus which provides thousands of men, women and children with much needed health care assistance.

The Economic Policy Institute released a new study last week that concludes that public employees in Wisconsin are under-compensated by 8.2% compared to private sector employees doing similar work.

"Public employees including nurses, child care workers, teachers, and construction workers are already suffering from pay cuts, mandatory overtime, lost benefits, and hiring freezes," continued Thomas. "These workers need to retain their right to bargain collectively to ensure that they can provide for their families. Gov. Walker's attack on their livelihood will not be tolerated. We will continue to fight for our rights as working people and will protest until the governor and the legislature recognizes the need to listen to Wisconsin's working families."

SEIU Wisconsin State Council coordinates the legislative and political agenda of Wisconsin's seven SEIU locals. SEIU is the nation's largest and fastest growing union with 2.1 million members nationwide and 17,000 members in Wisconsin. For more information visit www.seiwi.org.

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